

ACC Pursuing Information on Chemical Agent Disposal Sites

LANGLEY AIR FORCE BASE, Va. (AFP) — Air Combat Command (ACC) has launched an initiative to identify and clean up sites where chemical warfare materials may have been disposed of at many ACC installations in the past.

Named the chemical agent records search initiative (CARS), the effort is focusing on chemical agent identification sets (CAIS). The sets, which contain four-ounce vials of mustard agent, were used for chemical agent training from the 1920s to the 1960s.

The initiative was prompted by the discovery of sets during a routine environmental cleanup at Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D., in August 1997.

During the early 1980s, the Army destroyed about 21,000 sets, and officials here believe most of the rest were expended during training. However, discoveries like the one at Ellsworth suggest that some of the sets may have been buried, which was an acceptable disposal practice during the period they were used for training.

"There isn't an immediate danger to the base or surrounding communities," said Norm Guenther, the ACC program manager. "The potential for a problem exists primarily during construction activities when digging is taking place."

Phase II of CARS is currently underway, and ACC has hired Mitretek Systems, a nonprofit organization working in the public interest, to conduct confidential interviews with current and former Air Force employees to identify potential CAIS disposal locations. Besides conducting interviews, Mitretek will also review records at ACC bases and regional repositories for more information on CAIS use and disposal. Phase II is expected to be completed some time this year.

"We're hoping that the more people we reach, the more useful information we'll be able to gather," said Guenther.

The first phase, conducted between November 1997 and May 1998, involved a search of national records repositories. Mitretek reviewed correspondence, inventories, news reports, and other sources, looking for references to the use of or potential dis-

posal locations of CAIS. The results of Phase I showed evidence of historical usage of CAIS at most ACC bases; however, no specific disposal locations were found.

A recovered chemical warfare materiel response handbook was completed and provided to ACC installations during Phase I to ensure base people have the knowledge and the tools to respond appropriately in the unlikely event CAIS are discovered.

"Part of this initiative is also to make sure our people know how to respond should they encounter a problem unexpectedly," said Guenther. "With this handbook, they will be able to do that."

Anyone with information about the past use and disposal of CAIS at ACC installations should contact the survey team at Mitretek, toll free at (877) 237-8789 or send an E-mail message to afsurvey@mitretek.org.

Alternatively, letters may be mailed to Donna Grubb-Hewlett, Mitretek Systems, 7525 Colshire Drive, McLean, Va. 22102-7400.

Questions on the initiative should be directed to Guenther at (757) 764-9315, or the base environmental flight chief.

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Air Force photo



A FOUR-OUNCE BOTTLE OF MUSTARD AGENT WAS RECOVERED FROM A LANDFILL AT ELLSWORTH AIR FORCE BASE, S.D. AIR COMBAT COMMAND HAS LAUNCHED AN INITIATIVE TO IDENTIFY AND CLEAN UP SITES WHERE CHEMICAL WARFARE MATERIALS MAY HAVE BEEN DISPOSED OF IN THE PAST.